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ABSTRACT

The anticipation of the future has been the basis of conflict between people's dreams and the power that people have felt that they have had to act on their dreams. In a practical translation, the future, in the present, is constituted from at least some of the traditional elements of the past. However, the future is mainly constituted in the present, with those elements that are relevant to the future. It has been suggested that humanity has excelled in learning "how to do;" now the problem is whether or not what is "worth doing" can be learned. Technological development has become institutionalized together with a rational scientific value system based on prediction and control, the inertia of which can only mean a further reliance on science and technology to solve the problems of humanity. (JAC)

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THE NATURE OF THE FUTURE

A PRIMER

FOR

STRATEGIC PLANNING

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THE NATURE OF THE FUTURE

A PRIMER FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING

A Perspective

A development of thought concerning the nature of "the future" might appropriately be attempted with an architectural metaphor. Such a metaphor would focus upon a systematic relationship between the societal morphology (the ecological structure of societal networks) and its content (the symbiotic relationships of the elements of the society and organizational ecology). In a metaphorical essence, given the world and its humanity, history has been a story of conflict between humanity and itself and between humanity and its institutional environments. History appears to be a story of the transition from centralized control of man's activities--thru decentralization and towards a system of complementary management relationships.

The anticipation of the future, with the future represented as an uncertainty by de Jouvenal (1967) and Polak (1973), has been the basis of conflict between people's dreams and the power that people have felt that they have had to act on their dreams. Polak (1973) posed a metaphorical question. . . is the architect of the future one of a God and Savior, or is humanity, as philosopher, the architect of its own future? Is the equifinal state of humanity the result of a teleological process or a mechanistic process? In a modern context, a discussion of these questions focuses on the dilemma of a person's relationship to himself (acting in self-interest) and his relationship to institutions (acting in comformity). Thus we have a systemic relationship of structure and

content (institutions and individuals) upon which the eschatological "Kingdom of Heaven" or the philosophical "utopia" rests (Polak, 1973). In essence, can our modern communities and organizations be nice places to live and work--yet, still perform the intended functions?

Utopian Reality and Humanization

Considerable debate has raged through history regarding the materialization, or transformation, of a metaphysical "Kingdom of Heaven" into a utopian reality (Polak, 1973). The nature of reality is human sensorial experience according to Western rationality. As de Jouvenal (1967) asserts, "any intellectual representation of reality is fudamentally and necessarily inadequate, but essential". de Jouvenal (1967) further elaborates that "changes in society are the results of changes in ideas. . .", implying that intellectual representation of an organizational ideal is necessary for people to actualize that ideal into a reality. In a historical sense, the notion that historical images of the future have proven inadequate does not dismiss the recognition that effective newer images of the future, in redeeming older images that they supercede, carry out one essential task - they propel time forward, making history out of images of the future (Polak, 1973). Thus, inasmuch as history is basically a story of increased actualization and awareness, by humanity of its own self-worth - a humanizing process - then any loss or deprivation of its aspirations, beliefs or confidence, is dehumanizing and retrogressive. As Polak (1973) asserts, since the theological point of view has in general made way for the anthropological point of view (God has made way for man), it would be dehumanizing to eliminate humanity's alma mater - faith in God. In a practical translation--the future, in the present, is constituted from at least some of the traditional elements of the past. However, the

future is mainly constituted, in the present, with those elements that are relevant to the future. That is the essence of how we behave now and how we can be expected to behave in the future. This concept has important implications for educational curriculum as well as business and governmental commitments. The ultimate question is -- what do you believe about the future? Polak (1973) secularly asserts that a faith without an image of the future, just as an image of the future without a faith, lacks the dynamic power of propelling imagination. This process suggests that the metaphysical "Kingdom of Heaven" could become an earthly reality - if humanity retains both its image of an ideal future (utopia) and its faith. Thus, in the architectural metaphor, as the apprentice becomes the designer (giving a teleological thrust to the future) and those who share the image become the builders (providing the mechanistic thrust to the future) all participation becomes an activity of self-interest, and the construction (the actualizing process) becomes the institution (the Utopia ideal). At this point, the intent with which the actualizing process (construction or work) is performend becomes an issue of economics or aesthetics. Harman (1979) suggests a resolution to this participation dilemma by differentiating work into economic and self-development functions. In such a model, the extent to which the participants share the image of architectural plans (goals or dreams) can be considered. To the extent that it is a shared image, then the aggregate body of perspectives (persons) that share the image form a composite of the architectural intellect in effecting the planned image (building) or dream (utopia). Under this condition, the teleological authority of the architect is decentralized to the level of mechanistic actualization (people are doing what they want to do and

thus their work has a personal intrinsic and aesthetic meaning). It seems to follow from the logic of Harman's (1979) model that work (actualizing activity), if it is a purely economic function, can only be mechanistic and dehumanizing because it has relegated the teleological control (sense of purpose) to a centralized level of authority. The fundamental conflict within human organizations (as human awareness grows) seems to resolve into the origin of teleological direction and the extent to which that direction becomes a shared actualization. To the extent that competing architectural images (teleological directions) emerge, Harman's (1979) analysis of ". . .what is worth doing", has a relevant significance for the notion of self-determination within the composite perspective of the society or organization. In essence, what is the relationship, influence and power of factions within the group? It may prove that the acknowledgement of the concept of this architectural metaphor, with respect to time and space awareness facilitated by future communications processes, may contribute to a major cultural impact. A discussion of that possibility is beyond the scope of this paper.

Rationality

Rational or linear thought patterns charaterize modern Western civilization. The reliance upon rational scientific methodology has relieved the world of superstition and ritual domination and at the same time has effected a technological world system that is simultaneously responsible for the rational comfort that exists for some of the world's inhabitants, the irrational terror that threatens many of its inhabitants and the irrational disruption of the environment and social order that threatens all of the world's inhabitants.

It is generally percieved that what is rational cannot be irrational. However, according to Polak (1973) this unity of opposites is a perception from antiquity that has, in the twentieth century, given way to a sense of irreconcilable opposites. Harman (1979) suggests that humanity has excelled in learning "how to do"; now the problem is can it learn what is "worth doing". Harman futher elaborates that humanity's perfectly rational microdesicions are adding up to be perfectly irrational macrodecisions (a case of self-interest contrasted to institutional interest). In terms of how current organizations function, the question might be phrased as -- do we want to be governed by the tyranny of small decisions or by the tyranny of centralized decisions? Surely there is some participatory mechanism that leads to complementary relationships -- but it has to have time to take effect and begin working.

Stapledon (1931) used a science fiction medium to describe a world system failure that occured when too much faith was placed in the ability of rational scientific methodology to solve the problems of society. Harman (1979) cites the relationship, to humanity, of rational scientific logic and irrational religious theory as being essentially complementary and function of different metaphorical levels. In stating that humanity is both spiritual and rational he prepares for the discussion of a "new image of man" that will characterize the transformation of the industrial era into the post-industrial or communications era. It is interesting to note Stapledon's (1937) treatment of the question of rationality with respect to the teleology of creation and evolution. In his classic "Starmaker" he describes the creator (administrator) of the cosmos (institution or society) as a

experimenting infant - constantly conceiving the possibility of more subtle creation (changing the rules) - suggesting both a logic and imaginative intuition in the unfolding of the cosmos (institution).

The Conflict of More or Less:
A Transformation to What?

The Kahn and Wiener (1967) argument, a positive extrapolationist position, posits that the conjecture surrounding any dimension of the future chosen for exploration serves only to emphasize that we are not really competent to judge the future. The spectulation on the future is really more descriptive of intellectual ideas for influencing the future than the idea of predicting the future. By extrapolating what they call the "basic long-term multifold trend" (industrialization and technological advance) Kahn and Wiener feel that Western society will become increasingly manipulative, utilitarian, and based on rational thought and the senses. These are all conditions that Kahn and Wiener feel are basically desireable. Technological development, according to Wiener and Kahn (1967), has become institutionalized together with a rational scientific value system based on prediction and control - the inertia of which can only mean a futher reliance on science and technology to solve the problems of humanity.

Confronting the issue of continued reliance on technological and scientific solutions is Brown (1954 and 1978). Brown appears to be a negative extrapolationist. It is interesting to note that Brown's use of rational-analytical methods establishes an environmental pattern (macrolevel) that suggests a more temperate reliance on technological growth as the solution to world problems. Brown's concept of fissioning in human society seems compatible with Harman's (1979)

notion of transformation and transindustrial society. If humanity does not become compatible with a less extreme technological position then in Brown's estimation we may encounter world disaster (negative extrpolation).

Harman (1979) suggests that the dilemmas of industrial society -

1. The Growth Dilemma

   Historical solutions that resolved perceived scarcity problems - geographical or production expansion and technological advancement - do not promise the same relief in the future.

2. The Work-Roles Dilemma

   The thrust of industrial and technological development has been the substitution of energy-driven equipment for human labor. This renders humans superfluous as producers but not as consumers.

3. The World-Distribution Dilemma

   The instability and alternatives to disparities between the developed and the underdeveloped are intolerable.

4. The Control Dilemma

   Humanity has mastered the technological capability of "how to do", but seems unable to master the question of "what to do". In the words of Brown (1954), "what is the purpose of industrialization if we end up by replacing rigid confinement of man's actions by nature with rigid confinement of man's actions by man?"

can only be reconciled with a tranformation in the attitudes and values of humanity. According to Harman (1979) this transformation will produce a new society that will be based in the Perennial Philosophy with the following characteristics -

1. Being

   The attainment of higher awareness or "cosmic consciousness" about the control of one's participation in an evolutionary process.

2. Awareness

Personal awareness that experience and relationships are attracted as needed by the growth and maturity process.

3. Motivation

Through "Being" and "Awareness" the pull of the individual's material and ego needs is lessened and the deepest motivation is one to participate fully. Knowledge and participation become supreme values--economics becomes secondary.

4. Potentiality

The recognition that human potentiality is limitless and all knowledge and power is ultimately accessible to the mind looking within itself. All limitations are ultimately self-chosen in this model.

5. Attitude

Through awareness a new attitude toward life is developed. This attitude reflects "acceptance" and "nonattachment" (unbound to specific outcomes).

Harman (1979) further describes this transformation in terms of a New Social Paradigm consisting of (1) A New Image of Man, (2) A New Knowledge Paradigm, and (3) The New Central Project. According to Harman (1979) this transformation society will have the following characteristics -

1. A New Image of Man

A. The Ecological Ethic

Humanity's identification with the whole of nature and identification of its own self-interest to that of future generations.

B. The Self-Realization Ethic

The affirmation (through supra-conscious choice) that the proper end of all individual experience is the further growth in individual awareness and the evolutionary development of the human species. With this affirmation comes the recognition that the appropriate function of social institutions is to create environments that will foster human development.

2. A New Knowledge Paradigm

Knowledge in the future may be characterized by an expansion of the nature of scientific inquiry, both in the subjects examined and the methods used. In being a fundamentally moral rather than a value-free inquiry, it would not be reductionistic but would recognize that a teleological cause may complement rather than contradict a mechanistic cause. The new knowledge paradigm would recognize various realms of consciousness and acknowledge that concepts and metaphors appropriate to one mode or level do not necessarily fit together at another level.

3. The New Central Project

Society would be characterized by the pursuit of learning and planning, and would seek the modification of the Protestant Work Ethic with a Creative Work Ethic (work-play-learn). The Creative Work Ethic would complement the economic definition of productivity and growth with a rational-spiritual definition that would focus on human growth.

How Do We Get From Here to There

Harman's (1979) basic strategy for a non-disruptive transition is as follows -

1. Promote awareness of the unavoidability of the transformation as a first essential element of the strategy.

2. Construct a guiding vision of a workable future society built around the New Social Paradigm.

3. Foster a period of experimentation and tolerance for diverse alternatives, both in life-styles and social institutions.

4. Promote a systematic exploration of, and foster education regarding man's creative life.

5. Accept the necessity of social controls for the transition period while safeguarding against longer-term losses of freedom.

6. Encourage morality in government and public responsibility in the private sector.

Harman (1979) points out that the experience of psychotherapy suggests that it is at the precise time when the organism most feels as though the applicable social structure is crashing down that it is likely to achieve an inner reorganization constituting a quantum leap in growth toward maturity.

It is interesting to note that Edward Bellamy, in 1887, wrote about the dilemma of "what to do when you have enough". Bellamy suggested that emphasis be placed on aesthetics, the distribution of wealth, and the development of unselfish attitudes.

As the writer, I would add one more worthy effort -- maintain your strategic position.

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